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U.S. denies Greek KAL charge

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The Reagan administration responded with outrage Thursday to a charge by the socialist prime minister of Greece — a NATO ally — that the Korean airliner shot down by a Soviet fighter last year was on a U.S. espionage mission.

"There is not the slightest evidence," said State Department spokesman Alan Romberg, maintaining that "any such claim can only be termed irresponsible."

Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou may have been seeking to assuage anti-U.S. ele-

ments within his Panhellenic Socialist Movement after agreeing to let a U.S. AWACS radar aircraft operate from a base in Greece, said political analysts in Athens.

The level of acrimony indicated persistent U.S. problems with Greece — as well as sensitivity about Soviet-backed claims that Korean airliner was spying. "There are very strong feelings about this around here," said one State Department official.

The feelings were aroused after Papandreou, talking to members of his ruling party, said "The world is now convinced the (Korean) jumbo

was on a spy mission for the CIA and that it really did violate Soviet airspace for intelligence gathering purposes."

Romberg countered that such a statement "would be outrageous and demonstrate a willful disregard of the facts," and said the State Department has requested clarification of Papandreou's remarks.

In fact, Greek government spokesman Dimitri Maroudas said his boss's statement was based on reports in the U.S. and British press.

All 269 people aboard the Korean airliner were killed when it was shot down after straying into Soviet territory.